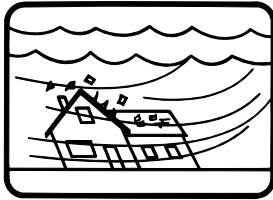


Dateline DHMH

Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

Isabel Knocks, DHMH Answers



For most DHMH employees, Tropical Storm Isabel meant an unscheduled day off from work. Unfortunately, many needed the time to assess damage to their personal property. For others, it was work as usual — just a little more hectic than normal.

When the highly-touted storm blew into Maryland with its power and fury on September 18, numerous areas of the Department kicked into gear. Staff from food control, laboratories, health care quality, mental hygiene, public relations, local health departments and facilities all played a role in the recovery effort.

DHMH activity officially began when Governor Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr. activated the Command Center at the Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA). Members of the Department's Emergency Management Team reported to MEMA two days before the storm and remained on duty until the assignment concluded more than two weeks later on October 3.

Even after DHMH activities at MEMA ended, the Department continued to deal with storm-related issues into late October. Food control staff was busy in-

specting crab packing plants on the Eastern Shore, lab staff were conducting tests and DHMH administrators were compiling applications for federal funding to help defray costs.

In the immediate aftermath of the storm, food and water safety were major issues.

Disposal of perishable foods that spoiled because of lack of power was a problem. Residents were advised to drive the spoiled goods to a landfill because the storm created a delay in normal trash pick-ups.

Restaurants that closed because of power outages or flooding had to be inspected before they could re-open. Local health departments were borrowing inspectors from other counties to help conduct these checks. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) even sent several sanitarians to Baltimore City to assist with its back-log.

Well water was affected in many counties, necessitating the Laboratories Administration in Baltimore to process over 630 well water samples, primarily from Eastern Shore and Southern Maryland counties.

Other activities involved all 24 local health departments and each facility, whose staff were constantly reporting damage assessments and advising of

needs and/or staffing assistance. The Office of Health Care Quality was busy following up on issues that affected hospitals and nursing homes. And, two public relations officers were on loan to MEMA to help field information calls from the general public and the media.

It was a classic example of public health at work. A big DHMH thanks to all who had a hand in this effort!

Don't Forget to Get Your Flu Shot!

The last chance to get your influenza vaccination at work is Thursday, November 13. Nurses will be available from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. and from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. in the lobby of the O'Connor Building to administer the shot. The cost is \$12.

The flu is more than a bad cold. It is a virus that spreads from infected persons to the nose or throat of others. Symptoms of influenza include fever, cough, sore throat, headache, chills and muscle aches. Most people are ill with the flu for only a few days, but others develop a serious illness that may require hospitalization. Influenza causes an average of 36,000 deaths each year in the United States, mostly among the elderly.

The best protection against getting the flu is the flu vaccine.

Continued

Don't Forget to Get Your Flu Shot! *Continued*

An annual flu shot is recommended for:

- People 50 years of age or older, people with chronic illnesses like diabetes or heart disease;
- People with any illness that weakens the immune system;
- Pregnant women who will be past the third month of pregnancy during the flu season;
- Health care workers; and
- Family members or anyone else coming in close contact with anyone in the above categories.

An annual flu shot is encouraged for:

- Healthy toddlers six to 23 months of age and their household contacts and care givers;
- People who travel;
- People living in dormitories; and
- Anyone who wants to reduce the chance of catching influenza.

More information on influenza is available on the DHMH Web site by clicking on 'Flu Information' under the 'Updates' heading at www.edcp.org.



Former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Joycelyn Elders delivers the keynote at the 15th Annual Conference on Suicide Prevention, co-sponsored by DHMH.

Congratulations to . . .

Alan Baker, Director of the Personnel Services Administration, who has retired after 32 years of State service. Alan is going to work for the American Public Health Association where he will be chief of staff to former DHMH Secretary Dr. Georges C. Benjamin.

The Joseph D. Brandenburg Center, which has recently been recommended for a "three-year accreditation with distinction" by the Council on Quality and Leadership, a status achieved by only 10 percent of accredited agencies in the U.S. The Brandenburg Center, along with the **Finan Center**, are both celebrating their 25th anniversaries. The Brandenburg Center is a Developmental Disabilities Administration facility and the Finan Center is a part of the Mental Hygiene Administration. They are both located in Cumberland and were recently featured in the *Cumberland Times-News*.

The **DHMH Striders**, who raised \$970 for the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation Walk, even though the walk was canceled due to Tropical Storm Isabel. Thanks to the 10 participants who raised these funds!

Connie Urquhart, statewide coordinator for Aging Services for the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA), who has been elected president of the Gerontology Division of the American Association on Mental Retardation. Connie has been with DDA for 37 years.



Above: Debbi Baer, longtime Kids In Safety Seats advocate, describes the benefits of booster seats during an Annapolis press briefing to kick off implementation of a new booster seat law.

We'll Miss You . . .

Louise I. Petty, of the Laboratories Administration, who retired on August 31 with 29 years of service.

Herdisene McIntire, of Community Relations, who retired on September 3 with 31 years of service

Montrice D. Thompson, of the Information Resources Management Administration, who retired on September 3 with 6 years of service.

Melvin E. Chambers, of the Laboratories Administration, who retired on September 30 with 13 years of service.

Ruth E. Sanborn, of the Laboratories Administration, who retired on September 30 with 38 years of service.

Calendar of Events

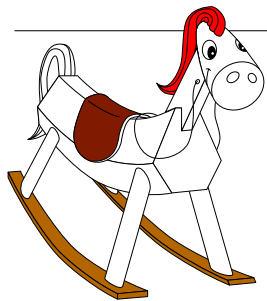
Wednesday, November 12 — *panel discussion*: **Mutants, Mosquitoes and Mad Cows: Close Encounters with Emerging Epidemics**; Becton Dickinson Lecture Hall, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health; 4:30 p.m. Phone 410-955-5194 for more information.

Friday, November 14 — *workshop*: **Building and Maintaining Culturally Competent Work Teams**; University System of Maryland - Shady Grove Center; 8:30 a.m. - 4:15 p.m.; \$120. Approved for Category I continuing education credits. Phone 410-706-1839 for more information.

Tuesday, December 9 — *workshop*: **Self-Management and Recovery Training (SMART Recovery): An Addictions Treatment Alternative**; University System of Maryland - Shady Grove Center; 8:30 a.m. - 4:15 p.m.; \$120. Approved for Category I continuing education credits. Phone 410-706-1839 for more information.

Tuesday, December 16 — *workshop*: **An Introduction to Financial Analysis and Management in the Human Services**; University of Maryland School of Social Work; 8:30 a.m. - 4:15 p.m.; \$120. Approved for Category I continuing education credits. Phone 410-706-1839 for more information.

Tuesday and Wednesday, January 27 - 28 and Tuesday and Wednesday, April 20 - 21 — **Blood Drive**, 9:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. O'Connor Building lobby. Call Stephanie Brown at 410-767-6403 for more information or to reserve a time.



Play it Safe When Buying Toys

Last year, an estimated 140,700 children were treated in U.S. hospital emergency rooms after sustaining injuries from toys, and 13 children died.

Since safety is the last thing children think about when they make their holiday wish lists, it's up to parents, grandparents and other gift-givers to make sure our little ones have safe, sturdy and appropriate playthings — during the holidays and all year round.

When selecting toys for children, first consider the child's age. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission requires toy manufacturers to meet strict safety standards and to label toys that could be a hazard for younger children.

Age recommendations are found on most toy packages, which helps to narrow the overwhelming selection found in toy stores.

Never buy toys for a child to "grow into," since playthings designed for an older age group might contain small parts that could choke a younger child. Regardless of the child's age, look

for quality design and construction in every toy you purchase. Don't buy toys that seem flimsy or poorly made, no matter how popular the item.

Choking is the most common cause of toy-related injury. Children under three years tend to put toys in their mouths.



When buying toys for these children, test small toys and parts of toys with a small parts testing tube (available at many toy stores), or a toilet paper tube. If a toy or toy part fits inside the tube, it's big enough to be a choking hazard. Balloons are particularly dangerous, since they can completely block a child's airway.

Some types of toys may contain dangerous chemicals. When buying paints, markers and other art materials, look for the word 'non-toxic' or the marking 'ASTM D-4236.' This means the product has been reviewed by a toxicologist, and if necessary, labeled with cautionary information.

Toys like bicycles, scooters, skateboards and in-line skates are safer when children wear the appropriate protective gear. If you plan to give any of these items as gifts, make them safer by also providing helmets, kneepads and elbow pads. Check the toys periodically to assure they are in good working order. Repair or replace any loose screws, chains or wheels.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) recalls thousands of unsafe toys and children's products every year.

Continued

Buying Toys *Con't.*

To check for recalled products, log on to the CPSC Web site at www.cpsc.gov.

Editor's Note: Thanks to Tara Snyder, Community Health Educator in the Center of Health Promotion, Education and Tobacco Use Prevention, for writing this article.

Check out your HMO

Log onto www.mhcc.state.md.us/ to check out information about your HMO. Click on 'Consumer Information,' then click on 'HMO and Quality Performance Reports.' From there, you will see a link to 'The 2003 Guide to Maryland HMOs & POS Plans for State Employees.' This file compares the State's largest health maintenance organizations on important measures of quality.

What Happened to the Good Old P B & J?

Has your child been unable to get a peanut butter sandwich at school? Or even brown bag the traditional P B & J?

More and more schools have stopped serving peanut butter and many are asking children to leave the peanut-containing foods at home.

Some might say this is nuts, but it is really a nut allergy.

Allergy to peanuts, walnuts, almonds and cashews affects an



estimated one percent of the American population, or about three million people.

Roughly 100 people die each year from food-related anaphylaxis, some of which is related to nut allergy. Anaphylaxis is a sudden, possibly severe allergic reaction to food that can involve the skin, lungs, heart and gastrointestinal tract. By comparison, there are 40 deaths every year caused by insect stings and 400 due to penicillin reactions.

Children who are allergic to mold, pollen or dust are more likely to have food allergies. Milk, egg and soy allergies are usually limited to childhood, while allergies to nuts, fish and shellfish often continue into adulthood.

Peanut allergy in children usually causes an immediate reaction, sometimes requiring the use of epinephrine to ease the symptoms with additional need for hospital treatment. Children with peanut allergies are taught not to accept food from others since foods without apparent nut content may contain peanut oil, peanut flour or may have been manufactured on equipment containing trace amounts of peanut products.

Teachers and school staff must be alerted to a child's allergies so they can be educated to respond properly to an allergic reaction.

The National Association of Secondary School Principals publishes *School Guidelines for Managing Students with Food Allergies*. These guidelines recommend creating a Food Allergy Action Plan for food-

related activities in after-care, during school lunch periods, on the school bus and in the classroom (www.foodallergy.org). Students should not be excluded from activities based solely on their allergies.

The treatment for peanut allergy is avoidance of the allergy-causing foods. Foods that may contain peanut protein, according to *The Allergy Report* are: baked goods, candy, egg rolls, marzipan, nougat, chili, enchilada sauce, flavoring, mandelonas, and sunflower seeds, as well as nuts, nut oil and nut flour. More information is available by searching 'peanut allergy' at www.aaaai.org.

Editor's Note: Thanks to the staff in the Family Health Administration's Division of Cardiovascular Health and Nutrition for writing this article.



STATE OF MARYLAND
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A publication of the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Office of Public Relations

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